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JAN 1912
Catalogue of
An Exhibition of
Etchings by

Auguste Lepère



With an Introduction by
Elisabeth Luther Cary



Frederick Heppel & Company
4 East Thirty-ninth Street
New York

February 28 to March 23, 1912

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Lepère

IT is the fashion of the moment to specialize in art as in other professions, and we no longer expect to find the multiple tendencies and ambitions of a Leonardo or a Dürer, or even of the self-contained Rembrandt, in the modern artist. He is a painter or a sculptor or a wood-engraver or an etcher. He is even more closely classified as a portrait- or a landscape-painter, an animalier or a decorator, a dry-point engraver or a disciple of pure etching.

There is, however, a wholesome and growing impression among thoughtful observers that extreme limitation and restriction produce weakness rather than strength, and when we find an artist who has something of the ancient flexibility of mind and hand it is worth our while to acclaim him.

Auguste Lepère has pursued a free course of development, rounding his capacities, and forming himself with balanced and reasonable attention to diversified interests. He was born in Paris in 1849. His father was the talented sculptor François Lepère, and he got, no doubt, from his father something of the latter's taste for suggesting passion, even frenzy, in small but monumental figures. While quite young he studied with the English engraver Smeeton, and spent his first professional years in the service of illustration.

Tiring of this field, he tried all things. He became in turn a metal-chaser, a decorator of leathers, a ceramist, an etcher, a wood-engraver and a painter. If we consider him chiefly as an etcher, it must be with the full appreciation that any craft mastered by him is made subsidiary to the larger principles upon which all works of art are based, whatever the medium or process. He has consistently declined to fritter away his admirable technique upon technicalities undertaken for their own sake, and his work in etching as in painting is the work of an intellect concerned with the problems of rhythm and harmony, color, tone and form, which assail artists in every field.

As an etcher he received his initiation from

Bracquemond, the most robust of temperaments and at the same time the most fastidious of technicians. Lepère has been worthy of his teaching. From the first he has sought to render his impression, recorded by a vision singularly prompt and synthetic, with precise care, patiently assembling all the complex virtues of his method to the task. To his slightest plate he has brought conscience and sincerity, and also a quality without which all the moral gifts with which human nature may be endowed would have availed him nothing as an artist: the rare capacity, that is, for retaining the freshness of his vision throughout a slow process of translation.

In one phrase is summed up the essential aim of the engraver who treats his art with respect, whether he uses it for purposes of reproduction or for original work: "Not to imitate. To express."

Lepère has followed his own doctrine to its logical conclusion. Never servile, even in his most faithful portraiture of a nature that enchants him, he works with a plenitude of science, but also with unwearied freshness of inspiration and a sympathetic feeling for the character of his subject, whether it is a curve of the river near Notre Dame where horses come down to drink, or a poor man's hut with climbing vines in bloom, or the wide marshes of the Vendée. With the passage of time his vision has grown larger and calmer, his interpretations magisterial; but in his most classic moments he does not forget to infuse into his composition a strong feeling for this intimate characterization. He is a true creator, living not only above but in his conception. He is at once serene and moved, in command of his intellectual instrument and impelled by his personal interest.

ELISABETH LUTHER CARY.

NOTE: The foregoing is part of an article by Miss Cary which appeared in the February number of *The Print-Collector's Quarterly*.

CATALOGUE

- 1 Route de Billancourt.
- 2 Le Débardeur, Quai de la Gare.
- 3 Travaux pour le Champ des Manœuvres d'Issy.
From the Jules Gerbeau collection. The third proof from the plate. Thirty-five impressions only were printed.
- 4 The Quai, Paris.
Very rare.
- 5 Carrières d'Amérique, près Paris.
Proof No. 19 of thirty-five printed.
- 6 Aux Fortifications, Porte de Versailles.
The first impression in the second state. Five proofs only printed.
- 7 Dimanche au Cabaret.
Proof No. 14 of thirty-five printed.
- 8 The Artist's Studio at Jouy le Moutier.
On Japan paper. Rare.
- 9 Une Ruelle aux Pied de la Cathédrale de Beauvais.
Second state. Twelve proofs only. Before the plate was cut at the left; before the title, date and signature at the top to the right.
- 10 The Same.
The plate cut; the signature, date and title added.
On Japan paper.
- 11 Décharge publique au Quai de la Gare.
Second state. Proof No. 3 of twenty printed.

12 Provins.

Thirty-five proofs printed.

13 Petit Gardeur de Vaches.

Thirty-five proofs printed.

14 Le Marché aux Légumes à Amiens.

Third state. Five proofs only printed.

15 Le Calvaire, St. Jean des Monts (Vendée).

Thirty-five proofs printed. Proof on Holland paper.

16 The Same.

Proof on Japan paper.

17 Clisson.

18 La Cathédrale d'Amiens. Journée d'Inventaire.

“The *Journée d'Inventaire* is a plate that shows clearly this double action of the artist's mind. The composition is stately in both line and mass. In the background rises the lofty architecture of the Amiens Cathedral; in the foreground, in deep shadow, is a group of figures diversely occupied. The upraised arms of these figures lead naturally to the pointed arches and ascending spires. In a similar fashion, the strong darks of the foreground mount in diminishing quantity through the heavy shadows in the recesses of the doorways to the luminous blacks that mark the slender openings in the towers. It is a beautiful upward movement that repeats the song of the Gothic spirit.

“These wonderful darks have also another function. Echoed as they are, in the small, sharp shadows of the multitudinous detail, they send the light quivering all through the picture. It pours down from a sky empty of clouds, and causes the web of decorative imagery with which the structure is draped to shimmer like a fabric set with precious stones. Only a true master of the subtleties possible to interwoven dark and light could thus command his atmospheric effect, and evoke from his slight and restricted materials the grandeur of the immense pile of stone raised by the hands of man, and the contrasting evanescence of the passing sunshine caressing every boss and hollow in the richly manipulated surfaces. It is perhaps not too much to say that nothing more remarkable in its kind has been done in the present century. The element of drama is added by the turmoil of little figures in shadow at the base of the cathedral, seen in minute detail through the

translucent darkness and agitated by their human accidents and emotions. The whole spirit of France, its imperishable monuments, its sparkle of sunshine, its reasonable architecture, its vivid life, may be inferred from this remarkable plate."

Elisabeth Luther Cary, *Auguste Lepère*.

19 **La Petite Mare.**

Thirty-five proofs printed.

20 **Juillet en Picardie.**

Proof No. 5 of forty printed.

21 **Le Nid.**

Thirty-five proofs printed.

"While all these plates are admirably expressive, one in particular, *Le Nid*, seems to me filled with melody, color and charm as well as with the efficient intelligence always to be found in Lepère's work. A little solid house with thick walls stands in greenery. Children, natural, happy, unconcerned, are playing in the foreground. Beyond is a curve of low hill and a glimpse of flat plain; and still beyond, a little town with its spire. It is all very naïve and fresh; the outdoor setting has much beauty; the types of the children are unhackneyed; the gestures and positions unconventional and spontaneous. A mere glance reveals the felicity of the subject-matter, but longer acquaintance is necessary before all the resources of the design are appreciated. Even in this playful note of pleasant summer pastime we get something of the gravity and serious purpose indispensable to great etchers as to great painters. It was this characteristic that led Lepère to pull down all the detail of the middle distance below the noble swinging line of the hillock, in order to keep the severity of that magnificent curve. It was this which led him to follow a repeating curve in the arrangement and environment of the children, apparently so carelessly disposed among their shrubs and flowers. 'Let all things play and bloom and make holiday,' he seems to exclaim in this rare plate, 'so long as the power of my design is not weakened by them.' The artist whose work says that to us is sure of long life in our memories."

Elisabeth Luther Cary, *Auguste Lepère*.

22 **L'Ondée.**

23 **Masures.**

Proof No. 11 of thirty-five printed.

24 La Bourrine aux cinq Enfants.

Thirty-five proofs printed.

25 Les deux Bourrines.

Thirty-five proofs printed. On Holland paper.

“In *Les deux Bourrines* . . . the groups of little ugly creatures, who form again a curved line of beauty, are characterized with a frank acceptance of their unclassic physiognomies that would have delighted the heart of Daumier. *Le Nid de Pauvres* is not less romantic in its Gothic avoidance of the ideal type.”

Elisabeth Luther Cary, *Auguste Lepère*.

26 The Same.

On Japan paper.

27 Le Nid de Pauvres.

First state. Before the signature and date. The first proof from the plate. Three proofs only printed.

28 The Same.

Second state. With the signature and date. Thirty-five proofs printed.

29 Le Jeu du Reposoir.

First state. The first impression from the plate. Eight proofs only printed.

30 La Chaumière du vieux Pêcheur.

Thirty-five proofs printed. Proof on Japan paper.

31 The Same.

Proof on warm-toned Japan paper.

32 L'Église de Jouy le Moutier.

Thirty-five proofs printed.

33 Arrivée au Moulin.

Proof No. 16 of thirty-five printed.

34 Le Moulin des Chapelles.

Thirty-five proofs printed.

“He is perhaps most of all his daily self in the little plate called *Le Moulin des Chapelles*. Here he shows us the machinery of the mill and the round white column of the structure as others have done, but he also shows us what others seldom do—the use of the mill. A patient horse is standing near, a man is shifting the bags of flour to his

back. It is not a mere accident of landscape; it has a social and utilitarian function; it is connected with human life."

Elisabeth Luther Cary, *Auguste Lepère*.

35 Vue du Port de la Meule.

Thirty-five proofs printed.

36 La Cathédrale de Rheims.

Proof on Japan paper.

37 The Same.

Proof on Holland paper.

38 Retour du Marché à la Volaille de St. Jean des Monts.

Thirty-five proofs printed. Proof on Japan paper.

39 The Same.

Proof on Holland paper.

40 Bourrine dans les Peupliers.

Thirty-five proofs printed.

41 Sous Bois la Ragonnette.

Thirty-five proofs printed.

42 Le Village de la Meule.

Thirty-five proofs printed.

43 À Gentilly.

Thirty-five proofs printed. Proof on Japan paper.

44 The Same.

Proof on Holland paper.

45 Bords de la Vie.

Proof on Japan paper.

46 Peupliers Têtards.

Thirty-five proofs printed.

47 Belle Matinée—Automne.

Thirty-five proofs printed.

48 L'Enfant Prodigue.

Second state. Eight impressions only.

"Classic Lepère can be, however, with a curiously vital appreciation of what the living classic must have been. He has an etching of a swineherd entering the yard in which the beasts are penned.

They move, grunting, toward him. Outside is a cluster of great trees with bushy foliage. The light is clear and warm. The folds of the swine-herd's mantle and his gesture are Greek. His figure might have passed across the Athenian stage, one fancies, at the time of Sophoclean drama. And the landscape has the deep repose immortalized in classic verse—such songs as in his extreme old age Sophocles made to do honor to his native village:

“ ‘Our home, Colonus, gleaming fair and white:
The nightingale still haunteth all our woods,
Green with the flush of spring;
And sweet, melodious floods
Of softest song through grove and thicket
ring.’ ”

Elisabeth Luther Cary, *Auguste Lepère*.

49 **Crépuscule.**

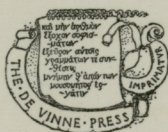
Thirty-five proofs printed.

50 **L'Arc en Ciel.**

Thirty-five proofs printed.

51 **Au Puits.**

Thirty-five proofs printed.



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